

**Nebraska Information Technology Commission  
Community Technology Fund 2002**

**Application Form**

**Project Title:** Building Information Age Communities Planning Mini Grants

**Submitting Entity:** University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension

**Grant Amount Requested:** \$20,000

**Project Contact Information (Name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail address):**

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**Executive Summary**

The University of Nebraska's Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, in partnership with the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Council, is proposing a mini grant program to provide 8 Nebraska communities or regional groups with up to \$2,500 in funding for conducting community assessments or other activities which support the development of community or regional plans to utilize information technology to enhance community and economic development. The communities or regional groups receiving the planning mini grants will also serve as pilot communities for the Community IT Toolkit materials developed by the NITC and Technologies Across Nebraska (<http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit>). Regional resource teams from Technologies Across Nebraska will provide assistance to the pilot communities. An electronic discussion list will also link members of community IT committees together so that they can learn from each other.

## Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

### 1. Describe the project, including:

- **Problem statement and needs assessment**
- **Goals (i.e., increasing Internet literacy)**
- **Project activities or outputs (specific, measurable steps to get to the goal-- i.e., offering six sessions of classes). Include training and staff development activities if appropriate.**
- **Expected outcomes (impact on the project's beneficiaries--i.e., at least 60 participants will learn to search for information on the Internet searches and send e-mail)**

**(20 points, 5 points for each bulleted item)**

### **Problem Statement and Needs Assessment:**

The impact of information technology on Nebraska's economy is significant. The IT industry accounts for 36,600 jobs paying an average wage of \$46,000--76% more than the average private sector wage in Nebraska. Nebraska exported \$248 million of high-tech goods—accounting for 10% of the total exports from Nebraska in 2000.

But information technology's impact is not limited to just the high tech industry. Home-based businesses, like Annie's Jellies—located outside of Valentine—are using the Internet to expand their markets. Other businesses are finding that their suppliers will only accept orders electronically. Businesses are increasingly using telecommunications infrastructure as a factor in determining where to locate. Communities need a new set of tools to respond to the economic challenges of the Information Age.

In the mid-90s, 50 local community IT committees were started in Nebraska. While some of these IT committees are still active, many are inactive or are struggling to develop a far-reaching vision and plan. A survey of local community IT committees conducted by the Rural Development Commission, found that over 40 communities have active community information technology groups. However, fewer than 10 have developed strategic community information technology plans.

Face-to-face meeting with community leaders confirm the need for assistance in IT development and planning. In meetings with the regional development network groups across the state, members indicated that many of their communities were addressing IT development by providing classes on using the Internet or on e-commerce. Several indicated that they had hosted or were planning to host technology fairs. However, members seemed uncertain on what steps that they should take next to help their communities prosper in the Information Age.

The University of Nebraska's Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, in partnership with the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Council, is proposing a mini grant program to provide 8 Nebraska communities or regional groups with up to \$2,500 in funding for conducting community assessments or other activities

which support the development of community or regional plans to utilize information technology to enhance community and economic development.

Communities or regional groups will be chosen by a selection team comprised of Technologies Across Nebraska members. The selection committee will choose communities or regional groups based primarily on community organization and commitment. Every effort will be made to choose communities across all geographic areas of the state.

The communities or regional groups receiving the planning mini grants will also serve as pilot communities for the Community IT Toolkit materials developed by the NITC and Technologies Across Nebraska (<http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit>). Regional resource teams from Technologies Across Nebraska will provide assistance to the pilot communities. An electronic discussion list will also link members of community IT committees together so that they can learn from each other.

The mini grant program will build upon the Building Information Age Communities conference scheduled for April 12, 2002 in Aurora. The conference will focus on the development of community or regional information technology plans. Community success stories will also be highlighted. The conference is sponsored by the Office of Governor Mike Johanns, the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, the University of Nebraska's Technologies Across Nebraska Initiative, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Nebraska Public Service Commission, and the Nebraska Rural Development Commission.

**Goal:**

Building leadership capacity in Nebraska's rural communities to address IT development.

**Activities:**

- Provide \$2,500 mini-grants to 8 communities or regional groups to conduct community assessments.
- Organize Technologies Across Nebraska members into regional resource teams to support communities or regional groups engaged in the community IT planning process.
- Pilot toolkit materials with the ten communities or regional groups chosen.
- Develop an e-mail discussion list so that participants can continue to communicate and learn from each other.

**Expected Outcomes:**

- At least 8 communities or regional groups will develop IT plans.
- Technologies Across Nebraska members will be organized into regional teams to provide support to communities.

- Community leaders will be better prepared to address IT-related community and development.
- Development of additional toolkit materials and/or revisions to toolkit materials which can be used to help other communities.
- Nebraska's communities will begin to utilize information technology in ways that enhance community and economic development.

## Project Justification

### 2. Explain how the proposed project supports one or more of the funding priorities by describing how the project:

- **Uses information technology to address community needs related to community and economic development, the delivery of local government and library services, and health care.**
- **Uses information technology to address community needs in innovative ways or initiates the use of information technology to address community needs.**
- **Demonstrates strong collaboration within a community or region in addressing IT development.**

(10 points)

**This project supports the use of information technology to address community needs related to economic development, the delivery of local government and library services, and health care.** The communities participating in this program will be better able to address community and economic development, the delivery of local government and library services, and health care.

**This project supports the initiation of community IT efforts.** One of the expected outcomes of this project is that at least 8 community or regional IT committees will develop strategic plans. The plans will lay the groundwork for the development of community IT projects.

**This project demonstrates strong collaboration among several statewide organizations.** Members of Technologies Across Nebraska include University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, the Community Council of the NITC, the Rural Development Commission, the Nebraska Development Network, the Department of Economic Development, the Public Service Commission, the AIM Institute, and the Center for Rural Affairs. A complete list of Technologies Across Nebraska partners is available at <http://technologiesacrossnebraska.unl.edu/html/partnership.html>. The regional teams will be composed of representatives of the statewide organizations listed above as well as representatives of community colleges, ESUs, school districts, and other local and/or regional resource providers. In this time of budget shortfalls, the only way to effectively address IT development is to leverage existing resources.

This project will also encourage communities to collaborate and learn from each other. Each year, the Community Technology Fund receives several applications requesting funds for IT planning. Having 8 communities working together is a far more cost-effective approach than funding one or two planning projects each year.

**3. Describe the expected benefits (both tangible and intangible) of the proposed project. If applicable, include any economic benefits or long-term cost savings. (5 points)**

**Benefits**

The proposed project will help 8 communities or regions realize the benefits of the Information Age. If Nebraska is to prosper in the Information Age, it is imperative that community leaders understand the implications of information technology and begin to incorporate information technology into their community and economic development processes. Although hard to estimate, the economic benefits of utilizing information technology are significant. The following stories from the Community IT Toolkit (<http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit>) illustrate the impact that information technology can have on a community's economic development.

**Ainsworth, Nebraska.** In 1990, when the community of Ainsworth was dealing with the aftermath of the ag crisis, a group of dedicated people called a town hall meeting to develop a strategic plan. Following that meeting of over 100 people, committees were set up around the issues identified in the strategic planning process. A technology center was developed, providing residents of the area with training in computer applications. An Information Technology Committee was formed, organizing other educational events and programs. As a result of this community effort, Advantage Receivable Solutions, an Omaha IT firm, decided to expand to north central Nebraska. Nearly 60 jobs with benefits have been added to the region.

**Aurora, Nebraska.** Through a strategic planning process, Hamilton County developed a strategic information technology plan in 1994. The plan was updated in 1999. Community leaders attest to the value of strategic IT planning in helping Aurora effectively utilize information technology to enhance its community and economic development efforts. Recently a software company moved to Aurora, attracted by the availability of office space, advanced telecommunications services, and the quality of life. A business incubator is being developed. In addition to attracting and assisting new business start-ups, the incubator program will provide local e-commerce services and educational programming for all businesses in the community. A web site for the Aurora Airport Authority, developed by a sixteen-year-old volunteer in 1996, generated a lead which has resulted in a \$250,000 hangar being built at the airport.

**Nevada, Missouri.** Dealing with the closing of a major employer, the Nevada State Hospital, Nevada (pronounced Ne-VAY-da) decided to reinvent itself as a telecommunity. The Nevada Area Economic Development Commission created the Nevada Telecommunity Development Corporation to attract small businesses and home-based workers. Local unemployment has dropped from 10% in 1991 to 2.2% in 2000.

## **Cost-effectiveness**

The proposed project provides a cost-effective way for addressing IT development in Nebraska communities. By developing regional support teams through the Technologies Across Nebraska initiative support can be provided to the 8 pilot communities by drawing upon existing resources. The mini grants provide an incentive for communities or regions to organize. Having a group of communities or regions going through the planning process simultaneously will facilitate lateral learning among the communities and resource providers. This year, the Community Technology Fund received four letters of intent for IT planning grants. It is more cost-effective to award one grant for \$20,000 which will benefit 8 communities than one or two individual proposals requesting \$20,000-\$25,000. If just one community effectively utilizes information technology as a result of this project, the economic return will far exceed the initial investment.

## **Technical Impact**

**4. Describe the hardware, software, and communications needed for this project and explain why these choices were made. (5 points)**

Not applicable

**5. Address any technical issues with the proposed technology including:**

- **Conformity with generally accepted industry standards. Projects which interface with other state systems (such as distance learning systems) should also address NITC technical standards and guidelines.**
- **Compatibility with existing institutional and/or statewide infrastructure.**
- **Reliability, security and scalability (future needs for growth or adaptation).**

**(5 points)**

Not Applicable.

**6. Describe how technical support will be provided. (5 points)**

Not applicable. Although this project is about providing support for communities, no actual support for hardware or software will be provided.

## Preliminary Plan for Implementation

**7. Describe the project sponsor(s) and stakeholder acceptance. If letters of support are included, list the entities or individuals submitting letters of support and briefly summarize the letter's content. Include information on any match being provided by project sponsors. (5 points)**

**Sponsors.** Technologies Across Nebraska and the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Council are the sponsors of this project.

Technologies Across Nebraska (TAN) is an initiative led by University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension to create awareness and provide education to support communities as they make decisions regarding their future use of information technology. The initiative will provide a network of expertise to assist communities in addressing IT-related development. Over forty entities are involved in a Technologies Partnership. Members of Technologies Across Nebraska include University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, the Community Council of the NITC, the Rural Development Commission, the Nebraska Development Network, the Department of Economic Development, the Public Service Commission, the AIM Institute, and the Center for Rural Affairs. A complete list of Technologies Across Nebraska partners is available at <http://technologiesacrossnebraska.unl.edu/html/partnership.html>.

At the December, 2001 meeting of the Technologies Across Nebraska partners, Steve Schafer, CIO for the State of Nebraska, and Jim Emal, Director of Strategic Technologies for the University of Nebraska, presented a draft action plan. Partners discussed the action plan and made additional suggestions the revised Technologies Action Plan includes five areas: coalition building, Information/resource development, community outreach, funding, address technical support issues, and develop new strategies.

This project directly supports the following two items under community outreach.

- Pilot toolkit materials by working with a small number of communities to develop community IT plans.
- Write a NITC Community Technology Fund grant application for community surveys.

Project partners have shown a strong commitment to Technologies Across Nebraska projects, including the Community IT Toolkit (<http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit>) and the Building Information Age Communities conference (<http://technologiesacrossnebraska.unl.edu/Itconference>) scheduled for April 12 in Aurora. The list of contributors to the Toolkit is available at <http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/toolkit/committee.htm>.

The Community Council of the Nebraska Information Technology has identified community IT development and planning as its highest priority. At the Council's January, 2002 meeting, members expressed their support for the Building Information Age Communities mini grants program. Many of the members of the Community Council have been involved in the development of the Community IT toolkit and the

Building Information Age Communities Conference and are looking forward to working directly with communities.

**Stakeholder Analysis.** While some of these IT committees are still active, many are inactive or are struggling to develop a far-reaching vision and plan. A survey of local community IT committees conducted by the Rural Development Commission, found that over 40 communities have active community information technology groups. Fewer than 10 have developed strategic community information technology plans. The needs most commonly cited by the local community IT committees were improving access to affordable broadband telecommunications services and funding IT projects.

Face-to-face meetings with community leaders confirm the need for assistance in IT development and planning. In meetings with several of the regional development network groups across the state, members indicated that many of their communities were addressing IT development by providing classes on using the Internet or on e-commerce. Several indicated that they had hosted or were planning to host technology fairs. However, members seemed uncertain on what steps that they should take next to help their communities prosper in the Information Age.

## **8. Describe the project team, including their roles, responsibilities, and experience. (5 points)**

### **Project Team Leaders**

**Beth Birnstihl, Associate Dean, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension.** As Associate Dean of the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension and one of the program directors for the Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, Beth Birnstihl has extensive experience in facilitation and program management. She will administer the grant and work with other project team leaders to form regional support teams and to organize the selection process to determine the 8 pilot communities. As leader of the IT Extension Educators, she will coordinate with the Connecting Nebraska Team of IT Extension Educators.

**Jim Emal , Director of Strategic Technologies, Office of the Vice President for External Affairs, University of Nebraska.** As director of Strategic Technologies for the University of Nebraska and one of the program directors for the Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, Jim Emal has extensive experience in project management of IT-related projects. As a former Extension agent, he has experience in working with communities. He will work with other project team leaders to form regional support teams and to organize the selection process to determine the 8 pilot communities.

**Sandy Scofield, Director, Center for Science, Mathematics & Computer Education, University of Nebraska.** As director of the Center for Science, Mathematics & Computer Education and one of the program directors for the Technologies Across Nebraska initiative, Sandy Scofield has extensive experience in project management. She will work with other project team leaders to form regional support teams and to organize the selection process to determine the 8 pilot communities.



**Anne Byers, Community IT Manager, Nebraska Information Technology**

**Commission.** As the Community Information Technology Manager for the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, she provides support to the Commission's advisory group on information technology issues affecting communities and has worked with stakeholders across the state to develop a community information technology toolkit. She will work with other project team leaders to form regional support teams and to organize the selection process to determine the 8 pilot communities. She will work with the regional support teams to pilot and evaluate the toolkit materials.

**Linda Tempel, Administrative Assistant , University of Nebraska Cooperative**

**Extension.** Linda Tempel has extensive experience in database and Web development along with excellent communications and interpersonal skills. She will provide administrative support for the project.

**Project Team Members**

**Connecting Nebraska Team, University of Nebraska Center for Applied Rural**

**Innovation.** The Connecting Nebraska Team is a team of IT Extension Educators who work directly with communities. They coordinate and deliver the Master Navigator and Electronic Main Street programs. Two team members, Connie Hancock and Carroll Welte, have experience in conducting community IT surveys. The Connecting Nebraska Team will provide support to the pilot communities through the regional support teams. The Connecting Nebraska Team includes Dewey Teel, Connie Hancock, Jennifer Nixon, Douglas L. Anderson, Phyllis Schoenholz, Dennis Kahl, Carroll Welte, Dorothy Davis, Jessye Goertz, and Larry Peterson. More information on the Connecting Nebraska Team can be found at <http://connecting.unl.edu/managementteam.htm> .

**Technologies Across Nebraska Partners.** Technologies Across Nebraska Partners will provide support to the pilot communities through the regional support teams. Members of Technologies Across Nebraska include University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, the Community Council of the NITC, the Rural Development Commission, the Nebraska Development Network, the Department of Economic Development, the Public Service Commission, the AIM Institute, and the Center for Rural Affairs. A complete list of Technologies Across Nebraska partners is available at <http://technologiesacrossnebraska.unl.edu/html/partnership.html>.

**Community Council Members.** Community Council Members will provide support to the pilot communities through the regional support teams. Community Council members include some of the state's most experienced community leaders in IT development and representatives of key support agencies. A complete list of the Community Council members is available at <http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/cc/members.htm>.

**9. List the major milestones and a timeline for completing each milestone. (5 points)**

**May**

- Form selection committee.
- Develop guidelines and application form.
- Prepare for June Technologies Across Nebraska meeting.

**June**

- Publicize availability of the planning mini grants.
- Begin organizing regional support groups at the June Technologies Across Nebraska meeting.

**July**

- Continue to contact regional and local resource providers who are not currently Technologies Across Nebraska members about being part of the regional support teams.

**August**

- Contact regional and local resource providers who are not currently Technologies Across Nebraska members about being part of the regional support teams.
- Select and announce the 8 pilot communities.
- Assign communities to regional support groups.

**September**

- Hold an initial meeting with each pilot community to determine their planning needs and to develop a plan to meet those needs.
- Develop a listserv to facilitate communication among regional support groups and pilot communities

**October- May**

- Work with communities to develop IT plans. Communities will be required to submit a written work plan and budget in order to receive mini planning grant funds.
- Evaluate toolkit materials. If necessary, revisions to toolkit materials will be made.
- Facilitate communication and sharing among the pilot communities through a listserv.

**May**

- Conduct regional focus groups to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the toolkit materials and the planning process and to solicit suggestions.

- Survey community leaders who participated to get quantitative information on their satisfaction with the process and how the process has impacted their ability to address IT-related development.
- Write up final report and document summarizing the project and highlighting lessons learned.

**10. Describe how the project will be sustained. (5 points)**

Both project sponsors, Technologies Across Nebraska and the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Community Council have made a long-term commitment to addressing community IT development and planning. After this grant ends, the project sponsors intend to continue working with communities through the regional support teams.

**11. Describe the project's evaluation plan, including measurement and assessment methods that will verify project outcomes. (10 points)**

**Project Outcome: At least 8 communities or regional groups will develop IT plans.**

**Quantitative Data Collection:** The number of communities or regional groups participating in the planning process and the number of communities or regional groups completing IT plans will be reported.

**Project Deliverable:** Local IT plans and any materials developed will be made available on the Community IT Toolkit Web site.

**Project Outcome: Technologies Across Nebraska members will be organized into regional teams to provide support to communities.**

**Quantitative Data Collection:** The number of regional support teams and a list of team members will be reported.

**Project Outcome: Development of additional toolkit materials and/or revisions to toolkit materials which can be used to help other communities.**

**Project Deliverable:** A report summarizing the project and lessons learned will be written and made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site. Any other materials developed or revised will be made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site. In the project's final report, these materials will be listed with links to their location on the Web site.

**Project Outcome: Community leaders will be better prepared to address IT-related community and development**

**Quantitative Data Collection:** Community leaders will be asked to fill out a brief survey indicating their satisfaction with the process and how the process has impacted their ability to address IT-related development.

**Qualitative Data Collection:** Regional focus groups will be conducted to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the toolkit materials and the planning process and to solicit suggestions.

**Project Deliverable:** A report summarizing the project and lessons learned will be written and made available from the Community IT Toolkit Web site.

**Project Outcome: Nebraska's communities will begin to utilize information technology in ways that enhance community and economic development.**

This expected outcome will probably not be realized until after the one-year time limit of this grant. However, every effort will be made to follow-up with the communities to document the ways in which information technology is being used to enhance community and economic development.

### Financial Analysis and Budget (20 points)

The budget will be scored on reasonableness (up to 10 points), mathematical accuracy (up to 5 points), and the strength and appropriateness of the match (up to 5 points).

Provide the following financial information:

	CTF Grant Funding	Cash Match (5)	In-Kind Match (6)	Other Funding Sources (7)	Total
Personnel Costs (1)			\$40,000		\$40,000
Contractual Services (2)					
Capital Expenditures (3) (Hardware, software, etc.)					
Supplies and Materials					
Telecommunications					
Training					
Travel			\$3,000		\$3,000
Other costs (4)	\$20,000				\$20,000
TOTAL	\$20,000	A	B \$43,000		C \$63,000

Match Percent = 68%

Match Requirement: This grant requires a 20% match. Please calculate your match by using the formula below to ensure your application meets this requirement:

Total Cash Match (A) + Total In-Kind Match (B) >= .20

Total Project Cost (C)

43,000 / \$63,000 = 68%

## Financial Narrative Notes

**Other Costs:** The \$20,000 will be used to award 8 communities with \$2,500 mini planning grants.

### In-kind estimates

The in-kind contributions of this project will be significant. A conservative estimate of \$40,000 in in-kind personnel costs was determined as follows:

15 Individuals from the project team and the Connecting Nebraska Team would contribute .05 FTE at a conservatively estimated \$40,000 average salary (\$30,000).

Another 10 individuals from the Community Council and Technologies Across Nebraska would contribute .024 FTE at a conservatively estimated \$40,000 average salary (\$10,000).

In-kind travel contributions are also projected to be significant. Project team members will have to make at least two visits to the 8 pilot communities. In addition the regional support teams will have to travel to the pilot communities.

Travel reimbursement costs @ \$.345 for round trip mileage for 8 communities in various parts of the state follow:

Lincoln to Sidney	\$237.36
Lincoln to Valentine	\$210.45
Lincoln to Norfolk	\$84.18
Lincoln to Nebraska City	\$34.50
Lincoln to North Platte	\$154.56
Lincoln to Grand Island	\$64.17
Lincoln to McCook	\$157.32
Lincoln to Fremont	\$71.76
Total:	\$1, 014.30